4/21/95

THE WASHINGTON POST

Ad Agency Offering Own Attack on GOP 'Contract'

By Howard Kurtz
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A televised attack on the Republicans' "Contract With America" is about to be launched from an unusual source.

Donny Deutsch, a prominent Madison Avenue advertising executive, has spent $50,000 of his own money filming a two-minute ad in which people on the street express grave concerns about the GOP agenda. Deutsch Advertising plans to buy time on a Washington station in the coming weeks, and Deutsch said he will try to raise $10 million for a nationwide media blitz.

Deutsch was part of a media team working on President Clinton's 1992 general election campaign but said he did not consult the administration about his effort.

It is not unusual for trade organizations and advocacy groups to run issue ads; the AFL-CIO, Chamber of Commerce and other groups recently aired commercials supporting and opposing the "Contract." But it is rare for an advertising agency to mount a partisan campaign on its own.

Deutsch, 37, whose clients include Ikea, Filene's Basement and Cabbage Patch Kids, said a privately produced ad will have more credibility than one financed by the Democratic National Committee.

"Somehow the private sector almost always gets involved on the right," he said Wednesday. "The contract was nothing less than brilliant packaging, warmed-over Reaganism. If we, as a leading-edge advertising agency, can't package a message on something we believe in, who then?"

Deutsch said the White House should be "damn happy" about his effort.

The black-and-white ad features man-on-the-street interviews against the backdrop of an enlarged "Contract With America." Participants were charged $1, and the money is being donated to the National Endowment for the Arts.

One elderly man says: "The contract is very greedy, very greedy, and the greed really hurts the small people and benefits the big people." Another older man says he worries about "cutting back on Medicare." A veteran says that "certain services I need from my country are going to be taken away." A young man assails proposed welfare cutbacks, saying: "It is merely punishing people who are poor, and that's just a sin."

"We did not script any of these people," Deutsch said.

White House senior adviser George Stephanopoulos said Deutsch had just sent him the ad. "The more people know about the guts of the contract, the less they like it," he said.

Tony Blankley, spokesman for House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), said, "it sounds like this guy is trying to bootstrap a nonadvertising budget into a news item. It's a pretty standard technique: Hold a news conference and attempt to make it onto the evening news." He said that "if I were the Democrats, I'd look for another way to spend my money."